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PRESS RELEASE

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Kinder Gives Progress Report on Missouri's Mental Health System

St. Louis – Lt. Governor Peter Kinder was in St. Louis today to present the First Annual Safety Report by the Department of Mental Health, and also to discuss the impact of Senate Bill 3 on the care and safety of persons served by the Department. The Report contains information regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Governor's Mental Health Task Force. Kinder was joined at the event at the St. Louis Metropolitan Psychiatric Center by Senator Michael Gibbons(R-Kirkwood) and Mental Health Director Keith Schafer.

The first report was issued to the Governor earlier this month. Of the 25 recommendations of the task force, the department reports that 10 have been implemented, 2 others are nearing completion, and 8 others are well underway. The remaining 5 recommendations are in the early stages of implementation.

"Real progress and improvements in client care are being made due to work of the Governor's Mental Health Task Force and the passage of Senate Bill 3," said Lt. Governor Peter Kinder. He added, "Our focus is on the safety of persons served by the department, whether they are served in a state facility or in a community program. All consumers must be protected and anyone who abuses or neglects our vulnerable citizens should be prosecuted."

Governor Matt Blunt signed legislation on July 13, 2007, that furthers his commitment to enhancing the delivery of services for mental health patients and ensures that Missourians can be confident that their state provides a safe and nurturing environment for patients. In 2006 Blunt asked Lt. Governor Peter Kinder to Chair the Mental Health Task Force and charged the group, his agencies and General Assembly members to work together to prevent instances of abuse and neglect and ensure that those who mistreat the vulnerable are held accountable and punished.

"Any instance of abuse or neglect in Missouri's mental health facilities is unacceptable," Gov. Blunt said. "Missourians need to know that their state will continue to take any and all necessary steps to better serve mental health patients and ensure their well being."

(more)

Senate Bill 3, sponsored by Sen. Michael Gibbons, makes significant enhancements to Missouri's mental health delivery system. SB 3 implemented many of the findings and recommendations outlined in the Governor's Mental Health Task Force, which was chaired by Lt. Governor Kinder last year. The legislation establishes formal ties between the Department of Health and Senior Services and the Department of Social Services abuse reporting hotlines. Last year the governor issued an executive order that directed the Department of Mental Health to work with the two agencies to better utilize the adult abuse hotline and the child abuse hotline to ensure that all cases of abuse or neglect are reported.

Senate President Pro-Tem Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, said Senate Bill 3 establishes a set of comprehensive mental health reforms based on recommendations from the Mental Health Commission and the governor's mental health task force.

"Those with developmental disabilities and mental illness are among our most vulnerable citizens. Last year a series of articles shined light on an alarming number of tragic deaths and abuses in both state-run and private mental health facilities showing we must act now," said Gibbons. "As a result, these tragedies have led to a safer day for these vulnerable citizens."

The legislation increases the fines and penalties for failure to report cases of abuse and neglect. The legislation also establishes the Mental Health Fatality Review Panel that is tasked with reviewing all suspicious deaths of mental health patients in Missouri.

Blunt created the Mental Health Transformation Working Group to transform the state's mental health system and improve the delivery of services to Missourians. The group received a federal grant totaling more than \$11 million to develop and implement a comprehensive and cooperative state mental health plan. The grant will support, among other costs, workforce development, technology enhancements, training, local system development and evidence based practices.